

Meeting Notes

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations
<https://portal.ct.gov/acir>

Special Education, Education Governance & Workforce Development Subcommittee

Monday, October 28, 2024

Agenda: <https://egov.ct.gov/PMC/Agenda/Download/26215>

A recording is available at: <http://ct-n.com/ctnplayer.asp?odID=23711>

ACIR Members present: Keith Norton, Jan Perruccio (Co-chair), Eric Protulis, Lon Seidman (Co-chair)

Other participants: David Abbey, Jennifer Benevento, Betsy Gara, Bryan Klimkiewicz, Sheila McKay, Teri Merisotis, Brian O'Connor, Matthew Pafford, Ashley Robles, Lindsay Seti, Shuana Tucker

OPM staff: Christine Goupil, Bruce Wittchen

1. Call to order, overview of meeting procedures, agenda review

Lon Seidman called the meeting to order at 1:03 and there was no overview of meeting procedures or agenda review.

2. If desired: review of draft notes of the [9/17/2024](#) meeting and [governance handout](#)

There was no discussion.

3. Discussion with CT State Dept. of Education (CSDE)

Jan Perruccio explained the role of this subcommittee and its interest in how various recommendations it has reviewed align with interests of the CSDE. Keith Norton introduced Shuana Tucker and Bryan Klimkiewicz and described their roles as the CSDE's Chief Talent Officer and Director of Special Education, respectively. Noting the subcommittee's interest in the [119k Commission](#) and its recently-published [Young People First](#) report, he also mentioned a meeting of leaders of the commission and of the CSDE. He also described [Educator Recruitment by the Numbers](#), which is a synopsis of the CSDE's teacher prep related programs.

Shuana Tucker said she would provide a basic-level overview of CSDE programs but said she can answer questions and provide further details. Her office's work is tied to the CSDE's strategic plan and she highlighted the goal of diversifying the educator workforce. She pointed out that 53.8% of CT's students are students of color and 17.9% of students have disabilities. 10.6% are English language learners and more than 180 languages spoken. 11.7% of teachers are teachers of color. To address this, CSDE has a goal to recruit and retain a diverse education workforce.

Ms. Tucker provided an overview of department priorities, noting the legislated requirement for districts to have educator diversity plans as of this year. The CSDE offered professional development and technical assistance to get to this point and all but 25 districts have submitted plans, which are under review. She provided some further background regarding the process and of support provided to districts. The CSDE's second priority is to enhance the certification process and she described the first phase, highlighting the

inclusion of Puerto Rico and adding that districts are happy Puerto Rico is included. She described factors in selecting states for inclusion and the number of teachers now teaching in CT due to that process.

The CSDE's third priority is the [Educators Rising](#) program. It has grown to 26 districts and more than 500 participating students and the CSDE is working to attract new districts. The goal is to attract students into the field of education and she noted a focus on males of color. She described another program that began as a partnership between CCSU and Bristol Public Schools and could be called a pre-apprentice program. Students enrolled in an educator preparation program work within districts 2½ days per week, have an assigned mentor, and gain experience while being paid as a substitute teacher.

Another program is the [Aspiring Educator Diversity Scholarship](#) program established by 2023 legislation. It is available for students who graduated from a priority school district school and are enrolled in an approved CT educator preparation program. There were 29 applications in 2023 and 84 this fall. The CSDE has awarded a total of 184 scholarships. Ms Tucker added that the registered apprenticeship program is another priority and that the CSDE worked on that with the Department of Labor for over a year. She described the [CT Teacher Residency program](#) and said the program has been piloted in Waterbury and New Britain. There will be a webinar in early November for districts interested in having apprentices serve in their districts. She provided further background and program details and also described the [Joint Apprenticeship & Training Committee](#).

Ms Tucker pointed out that the CSDE could not do this alone and works with a variety of partners. She encouraged subcommittee members to check out the CSDE's [Educator Diversity Dashboard](#) and invited questions. Lon Seidman said his district is struggling to diversify its workforce because they do not get the applicants. How do we ensure such districts are not vilified for not having a diverse workforce and how do we get such applicants to apply in districts that they're not in now?

Ms. Tucker said Lon's district is not alone and, this coming year, the CSDE intends to work with those districts to review their plans and their resources and work on a strategy and find other opportunities to diversify their staff. She noted that few staff are currently working on this at the CSDE but they are willing to come out now. Jan Perruccio asked for clarification about the apprenticeship programs and Ms. Tucker explained that the first is offered through CCSU and the second through the [Capitol Region Education Council](#) (CREC).

David Abbey mentioned the focus of one of the programs being on recruiting males of color to teaching, which he agreed is critical, but noted that only 25% of teachers nationwide are male and they are especially unlikely to be at the elementary or middle school level. He asked if something can be done without diminishing efforts to recruit males of color to attract males in general to teaching.

Ms. Tucker said it is a great question. She noted that only 2% of people in the education profession, nationwide, are males of color, so that is at the top of the list, but attracting males is one of the goals of the previously mentioned Education Rising program and 12 males participated in their New Britain pilot. She provided further details of support being provided to them and about other related efforts. They want to get more of our young people interested and are launching Marketing campaign in January. She highlighted the need to also appeal to parents because research shows that parents are not embracing the education profession for their children even if their children want to be a teacher. Ms. Tucker said the state is seeing growth through its programs and she added that they are also looking at what are other states doing, such as NY's initiative to attract more males.

Jennifer Benevento said she appreciates the efforts to diversify the education profession with respect to color and gender, but noted that almost 18% of the student population has some sort of disability and asked if there is an opportunity to look at our special Ed population to help solve the chronic lack of teachers in special education. Students might want to use their experience to help the next generation. That could be inspirational for young kids. She asked if there is a model for doing that. Ms. Tucker said there are some ongoing internal discussions at the CSDE and provided an overview of some ongoing efforts, one of which

leads to positions as special education paraprofessionals. Bryan Klimkiewicz described other active programs creating that interest in special education as a potential career option and agreed that educators coming from that background can be very inspirational for their students. He also noted the challenges regarding self-disclosure of the of the disability once out of school.

Lon Seidman mentioned the state's alternative routes to certification and that we've had that program for a number of years. He pointed out that the crisis in recruitment is right now and said it is great that we are trying to recruit middle schoolers and high schoolers, but we have an immediate need in special needs areas and also in general education. He asked if there has been any effort to better enable people to make a career shift into education.

Ms Tucker outlined the current approach and said many [alliance districts](#) are supporting employees enrolled in CESD programs. The expectation is that people return to their home district for at least three years. She added that the CSDE is also looking at the potential barrier posed by certification exams and is considering other measures that can be used to assess someone. There was further discussion of alternative routes to certification.

Teri Merisotis pointed out the problem people who have spent significant time other professions will encounter if they become teachers, who don't get Social Security. Lon and Shuana agreed it is a big barrier. Jan Perruccio noted the difficulties of recruiting people from other states and asked about the status of the [CT Educator Preparation and Certification Board](#). Ms. Tucker said the CSDE is going to schedule the first meeting and provided further background regarding expectations.

The group proceeded to the special education section of the agenda and Bryan Klimkiewicz, CSDE's Director of Special Education, provided some background, highlighting the rise in special ed. prevalence rates, also noting the decrease in overall student populations. He mentioned the tracking of special ed. and other job postings but, despite some successes, shortages are not being addressed. He noted that vacancies are a moving target, shifting through the year, but the CSDE is monitoring where they are and the proportion that are in special ed.

Mr. Klimkiewicz described two programs for administrators, one of which is an aspiring leadership program, working with UConn, based on a national model. We have seen some success in helping to prepare administrators and he also mentioned the CSDE's work with the [CT Assoc. of Schools](#) (CAS) to provide an aspiring leadership program, noting participants' access to a coach and a mentor. He provided further background regarding efforts related to [Title 1](#) requirements. He highlighted CSDE's efforts regarding the onboarding process for paraeducators and added that they are sharing best practices with school districts. He also mentioned the ongoing work of the [Task Force to Study Special Education Services and Funding](#) and the [State Advisory Council for Special Education](#).

Mr. Klimkiewicz said the CSDE has been working to support our school districts. He mentioned recent union surveys of educator job satisfaction are finding that special educators feel less respected in their roles, that there's lack of understanding of what they do, and are overwhelmed by legal requirements and paperwork, leaving them less time to work directly with students. The CSDE is working with [New Solutions K12](#) to do focus groups to see if there are common themes. He invited questions and said he is happy to provide further details.

Lon Seidman asked about the level of detail in tracking of special education vacancies and if the CSDE is able to provide information to districts so they can see if a neighboring district has additional capacity and they might be able to share the cost. Mr. Klimkiewicz responded that one of the CSDE's public-facing dashboards allows them to share that information when they become aware of vacancies. He provided further background about CSDE efforts regarding special education workforce recruitment and services that might be shared or missed as a result of vacancies, highlighting that parents should be informed of vacancies and services missed due to vacancies should be documented. The CSDE is considering how such services can be shared regionally.

Mr. Klimkiewicz spoke of options to support the state's school districts and described a program with the [Regional Education Service Centers](#) (RESCs) to conduct evaluations for districts. Lon Seidman pointed out that a district might need to only fill a particular special education position half-time some years and, with interdistrict sharing, we can maintain full-time staffing even if they might be at a different school some days. Jan Perruccio said a number of districts are sharing programming or sharing staff, some through RESCs and others district-to-district, and said members of this subcommittee are writing a recommendation to incentivize that. She highlighted the opportunity to provide programs to small numbers of students within their school or closer to home than other options.

Teri Merisotis asked about the timing of education workforce data, noting that August news reports of vacancies would include some positions filled by people hired later. She suggested that October data would be better and there was a discussion of the frequency of data reporting. David Abbey said special education is the most volatile and costly burden on local taxpayers and CT leads the country in the percentage of students receiving special education services who are placed out of their districts. He added that 21.6% of educational costs are devoted to special education. Mr. Klimkiewicz said the state has reduced out-of-district placements from 6.47% to 5.8% in the last three years but is still on the high end, nationwide. He added that CT has 84 approved private special education programs, while some states have none, and commented on the benefit of such options being available.

Mr. Klimkiewicz pointed out that CSDE does not have a role in setting costs for such programs, but pointed out that NY and MA have formulas for setting rates. He said some program costs in MA are not lower than costs in CT, but there are concerns here about irregularities in fees charged for comparable services. New programs come into our state on an annual basis and others close and we have State Board of Education-approved standards for fiscal practices, it also is necessary to look at the cost of programs.

David Abbey mentioned mediated settlements with parents to send students non-approved programs and asked if there are data regarding how much is spent on non-approved programs for Special education services. Mr. Klimkiewicz noted that districts do not necessarily report those to the state and that settlements are private agreements between districts and parents. He will check, but he does not believe the CSDE has access to that information.

Mr. Klimkiewicz said the CSDE's role is to support the school districts to ensure they have the capacity to meet the needs of their students. He said districts sometimes may not, mentioning his previous experience working in a very rural district that had one student with particular needs and noting the fiscal and logistical challenge of designing an in-district program for one student. Regionalization may be needed for districts with small populations to handle those rare circumstances in the least restrictive environment. He also noted the challenge when a parent has lost trust or faith in the school district and push for an outside placement even if the district believes it can meet those needs.

4. Plans for remainder of 2024 and for the 2025 legislative session, considering the ACIR 2024-25 Work Program and work by others

- [119k Commission](#) and [2024 Report](#)
- [2024 Report of Findings of the Task Force To Study Special Education Services and Funding](#)
- [2020 Report of the Task Force to Promote Municipal Shared Services](#)
- [MORE Commission BOE Spring Recommendations](#)
- [MORE Commission Regional Entities – Education Policy](#)

Lon Seidman said the discussion was great and we need to do this again, complimenting Ms Tucker and Mr. Klimkiewicz for their detailed answers to this group's questions. As for planning for the group's report, he said he and Jan spoke about some of this group's assignment being tied to work by the previously-mentioned [Task Force to Study Special Education Services and Funding](#) and [State Advisory Council for Special Education](#). The ACIR, however, provides value in being a collaboration of just about every

stakeholder in the state that can apply a lot of knowledge and resources to evaluate the work those groups are doing. Their reports might not be completed by the time we want to get our report out, so we must figure out how we want to present our interim report, knowing work is still being done by those other task forces. We have some consensus on our governance assignment, but we do not want to reinvent the wheel or step on toes regarding the special education and workforce development work of those task forces.

Jan Perruccio said people seem to be moving in the same direction and she and Lon can consolidate the minutes of the group's meetings and the reports that have been shared to provide everyone with a starting document to respond to before our next meeting, so the group can identify priorities for the initial report. Lindsay Seti said CCM's Joe DeLong will be speaking to the full ACIR about the previously mentioned 119k report and is also willing to speak to this group.

Lon Seidman mentioned the [Hartford Foundation for Public Giving](#) report, [K-12 Regionalization in Connecticut: Pros, Cons and Surprises](#), and said he wanted to get it back on people's radar screen. It looks at the economy of scale but also at how that is lost when a district is too big. He added that he has been doing an analysis of reports and CSDE objectives and there is a lot of consensus among them that this group can discuss at future meetings and present in our work in a way everyone is comfortable with. Jan Perruccio thanked the speakers from the CSDE for sharing their perspective and said it rounds out other presentations this group has received and documents we have read.

Upcoming meetings

Jan Perruccio read the dates of upcoming meetings.

- November 1, 2024, 9:00 am Full ACIR
- November 12, 2024, 9:00 am Education Subcommittee
- November 21, 2024, 9:00 am Municipal Workforce Development Subcommittee

5. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:03

Notes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM